

A Tale of Two Fists

THE LIFE STORY OF JACK DEMPSEY

BY DAMON RUNYON

It detracts nothing from what Jim Flynn was in his day to suggest that there was something queer about his first match with Jack Dempsey. That occurred at Murray, Utah, that suburb of Salt Lake City, which I have mentioned before, and I have had several versions of the affair. None of them came from Dempsey, however. He talks very little about that matter, and he has reason for reticence on the subject. It does not reflect much credit on him, whatever the circumstances. They thought right well of Jack's fist ability around Utah about then, and I have heard that the Dempsey-Flynn arrangement was a sort of selling directed against the home guard. Certainly no one thought Flynn could stop the rugged young Dempsey.

Another version that has come to me is that Dempsey was in some sort of jam, and they put it to him, "they" being the manipulators of the event—that the only way he could extricate himself was by not winning that fight with Flynn. All this sounds vague, and involved, but I have never talked with anyone who knows more than vague and involved information in the premises.

Billy Roche, the famous old referee, who has been with the A. E. F. in France and Germany for some months

past, putting on boxing shows for the soldiers referred the fight. It was Billy Roche who, as I have narrated, brought the first news of Dempsey's last, and predicted a big future for Jack. That, of course, was before the Flynn fight.

It is said Dempsey got \$200 for his end of the affair. I know a man who claims to have held the money contingent upon the result which was stated, and paid the money over to Dempsey. It must be said for Jack that he delivered, quickly, if it is true, as alleged, that he was delivering.

Flynn hit him on the chin in the first round. Down went Jack like the proverbial log, and Billy Roche, with a singular expression on his countenance, counted ten. The populace murmured: "Well, well! Who'd a-thunk it?" any gentlemen who chanced to have a bet on James collected, and everybody went their various ways.

A fellow was telling me that caggy old J. Flynn was a little bit skeptical about anything letting him win on the chin, even after they got in the ring. James had been hit in that place so often himself that a reversal of the usual order seemed too good to be true.

This fellow was telling me that as he hurried his head behind his shoulder in that old characteristic attitude of his, and squinted an eye along his extended leg, a man along a few twining pieces, James asked a question.

"Is it all right, Jack?" he whispered, huskily—so my man tells me, "Is it all right now?"

And Jack indicated, apparently, that it was "all right" the first time Jim landed.

So much for that one. I see no reason for exculpating Dempsey if the thing was "screwed," but I must say I am always heartily in favor of Jim Flynn winning rights, no matter how he does it. For Jim is my fellow-townie, and my friend, and he has accepted enough thumpings in his time to be absorbed forevermore.

Quite a while after the Murray meeting, Dempsey caught him over in Port Sheridan, and ducked him under the chin in the opening round, but I don't esteem that so much to brag about. Jim had then received some even from his Murray form. He was a good old wagon, but they can't go on always.

There was no particular "holier" over the Murray matter at the time, or for some time afterwards, and Dempsey went to Oakland, Cal., with Fred Winsor, a promoter and manager, now located in Denver. His first match on the Pacific coast was with Al Norton. That was at the four-round game now prevalent in those parts, and the first bout was a draw.

They were rematches, and fought another draw. Dempsey was then hooked up with Willie Meehan, and lost decision. Oddly enough, Meehan holds two decisions over Jack, and it is the Coloradoan's failure to stop Willie that has caused some people to doubt his ability to lick Willard.

Meehan may be a better fighter than most flaccid experts are willing to admit, which may be the reason Dempsey has been unable to stop him, but his style is certainly bizarre. His fighting at first impresses one as more clowning than anything else. It is that very style that makes him hard to beat.

He runs, falls, gets behind a man, staps and generally cavorts about in a most astonishing manner, but all the time he seems to be scoring points. Around the East they do not credit Willie with any class; none the less a couple of Western referees have awarded him verdicts over Dempsey.

His showing against Meehan disgusted Dempsey, and also disgusted a lot of folks who saw it. They allowed that he couldn't fight, and never would be able to fight, and Dempsey came to the conclusion they were about right.

Meantime he had run into Jack Kearns. Jack had been doing a bit of dabbling in the wrestling game prior to that time, and was interested in a big match which took place in San Francisco. His associates in the affair earnestly walked out on Jack with most of the dough, leaving him holding a large sack, so he was thoughtfully turning his attention to boxing, his real forte, again.

Jack had a little fellow named Red Watson in training, and he noticed a big, burly bird around the gym where Watson was working, who was doing his best to box, but making no headway. This was Dempsey. Kearns rather liked his makeup, but his aesthetic soul revolted at Dempsey's style.

"Step around, why don't you?" he remarked, and Dempsey got to stepping. That advice marked his first real improvement as a boxer. Incidentally, it marked the beginning of his association with Kearns.

After the Meehan affair, which seems to have temporarily "ditched" Dempsey as an attraction, our hero told Kearns of his desire to return to pugilism, and Kearns wagged his head affirmatively.

"Yes, you'd better quit awhile," he advised, "go away somewhere, and rest up, and then we'll see what can be done."

Dempsey went to Seattle and got a job in a shipyard. He worked there steadily for three months, laboring hard and living quietly. Kearns sent for him to return to Oakland to meet Meehan again.

"I think I'm in good that time," says Jack, "I had him hanging on the ropes at the finish."

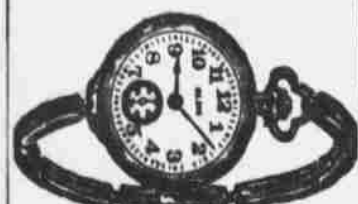
Kearns nods his head, solemnly.

Then Dempsey knocked Al Norton kicking in the first minute of the first round. Next he beat Bob McAllister, a fast-moving fellow, who was licked by Mike Gibbons in New York. A knock-out of Charley Miller in a round followed.

Dempsey was coming on.

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Giant Infielder Is Having One of Best Seasons of Career.

In the excitement caused by the sensational hitting and fielding of Ross Young, the timely swatting of Larry Doyle and the generally fine work of the Giant team as a whole, the results obtained by at least one member of the cast have been somewhat overlooked, says a New York critic.

The player in question is Arthur Fletcher. It was 11 long years ago that Fletcher first eased his way into a major league game, but he is still very much in the running. There are more flashy shortstops in the game than the Collinsville veteran, but John McGraw would hardly consider passing Fletcher along in exchange for any of them.

Injuries sustained on the eve of the opening of the championship season slowed Fletcher up in the first few days of play and finally forced him to fall out of line and allow Eddie Stange and Al Baird to take turns at plugging the gap between second and third bases. It took him to remain on the bench, however, and he missed only six games. He was not in the best of shape when he reported for duty after his brief lay-off, and even now his back, wrenched in an exhibition game in mid-April, bothers him when he makes an unusual condition is only faintly reflected in his work.

Since resuming his place in the lineup Fletcher has peppered the pellet at a 361 clip. This average is not a particularly remarkable one, yet when the details of his batting are scanned it will be found that his hits have been of a most timely nature. For instance, in the opening game of the series with the Cubs it was a single by Fletcher, with the same count, that knocking out Allen's Post-Bate in each shoe in the

made off Grover Cleveland Alexander in the sixth inning, that chased the winning run over the plate. Two days later he launched the third lining attack on Douglas that netted the Giants five runs with a double to left. An injury to "Shufflin' Phil" was knocked out of the box. On the following day he wielded a mean stick in the course of the run making that brought about the defeat of Lefty Tyler, and in a recent game he reached Slim Salles for the second time in the Giants' first tally. As it developed this run would have won the game for the Giants, as Ruben Benton blanked the Reds.

If Fletcher's batting has been of a timely nature his fielding has been doubly so. Of course he has booted a few grounders, but at critical moments, when the blocking of a hard hit ball has meant the checking of an incipient rally by the opposing club, he has not been found wanting. Fletcher is one of the players who, because of his age and length of service, was regarded rather pityingly by sundry critics as being past his prime. But he is hardly in any need of sympathy.

Johnny Lavan, erstwhile Brownie shortstop, later with Washington and said to be slated for the St. Louis Cardinals, worked out for a few days with the St. Louis Browns, while waiting for completion of the deal. But he enjoyed the club's hospitality only until about it. After telling Lavan that he admired his nerve Phil told the player to move along to some other park if he wanted to do any ball playing. It will be remembered that Lavan brought suit against Sal a little more than a year ago, the same resulting in his transfer to Washington. But Pratt brought suit at the same time and he was shipped to the Yankees.

Asia found a place on the map of the trotting turf when Sveer recently trotted a mile in 2:07 1/4 at Omaha, Nebraska. Sveer is one of the horses that were shipped across the Ural mountains after the upheavals in Petrograd and Moscow, and at Omaha, under the protection of the government set up by Admiral Kolchak, he succeeded in making a record of 2:07 1/4. At the same time he also placed his name at the top of the Russian-bred trotters, the limit prior to his performance being 2:08, which was made by Proctor at Moscow. This 2:08 is also the European record, and when made supplanted the 2:08 3/10 made by Silko when he won the Summer prize at Vienna in 1905.

Sveer is by Zamick, 2:11 1/4, a son of Quarter Cousin.

Frank Baker had gone 14 games without striking out when Guy Norton made him swing in the recent Indiana-Yankees series.

That joke of crediting victories against shown up in the Reds-Phillies game of May 28. Ray Fleher gets credit for winning the game, though known out of the box in the seventh inning. The pitcher who saved the game for him gets nothing but his name in the box score.

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